

Consonant Clusters

Objective: To help learners identify the probable number of consonants preceding or following a peak in a given syllable of the English language.

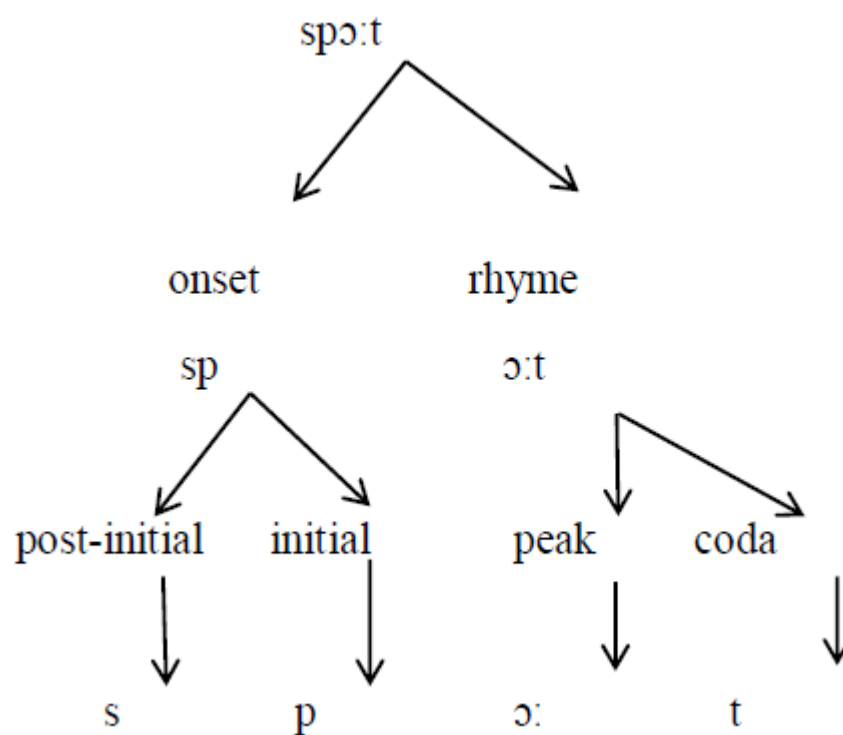
Consonant clusters refer to the sequence of consonant phonemes with no intervening vowel between them. We usually talk about consonant clusters as arrangements or sequences of two or more consonants within the same syllable. **For example**, in the syllable **strikes** /straiks/, we can see a sequence of three consonants at the beginning of the syllable /str/, and two consonants /ks/ at the end. The word **sixth** sɪksθs begins with one consonant /s/ and ends in a sequence of four **consonants** /ksθs/. Any single consonant can occur as the onset of an English word **except** /ŋ/ and /ʒ/.

1. Syllables beginning with two Consonants

Two types of initial two-consonant clusters can be identified in English language. One type is composed by /s/ followed by **,m smell** /smel/, **n snow** /snəʊ/, **k skill** /skɪl/, **f sphere** /sfɪə/, **l slot** /slɒt/, **p sport** /spɔ:t/; /sr/ is also possible as in **syringe** /sɪrɪndʒ/, or /srɪndʒ/, **stay** /steɪ/, **sw suite** /swɪt/, **sj sewer** /sjʊə/. In these syllables, we call the first phoneme of the cluster /s/ as the

pre-initial and the consonant phonemes that follow the /s/ as the initial consonants. However,

Roach (2009) signals that clusters formed by s+ l, r w, "can be analysed *either* as pre-initial s plus initial l, w, j, r *or* initial s plus post-initial l, r, w, j,. There is no clear answer to the question of which analysis is better" (p. 69).



The other set begins with one of the following sounds (p b t d k g f v θ s ʃ h l m n) followed by /l, w, j, r/. The first consonant of this set is called initial, while the second identified as post-initial.

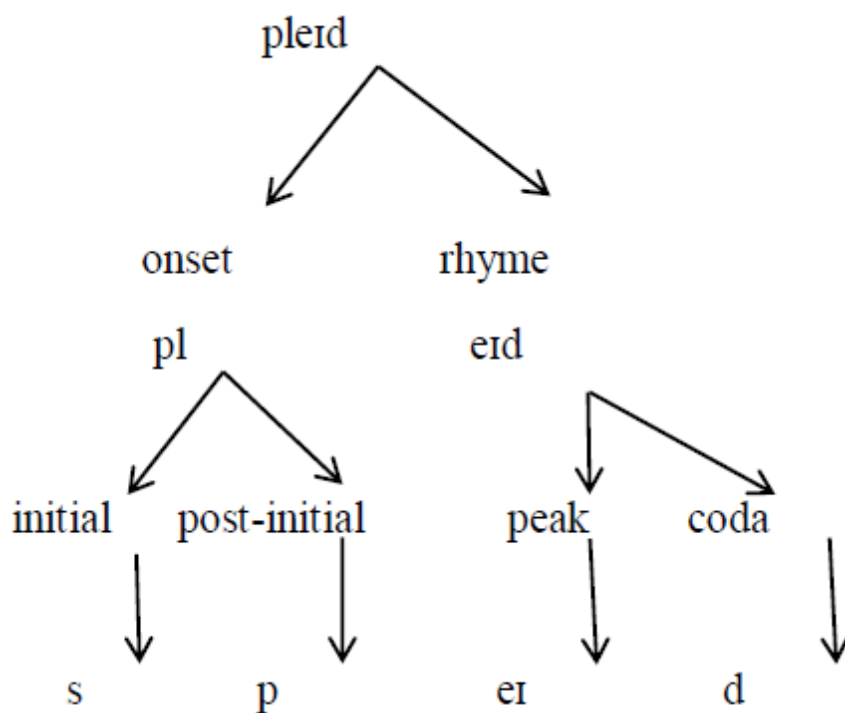


Table 7: Initial CCV Clusters	
p+ l, r, j	l+ j
t+ r, j, w	f+ l, r, j
k+ l, r, j, w	v+ j
b+ l, r, j	θ+ r, j, w
d+ r, j, w	s+ l, j, w, p, t, k, m, n, f
g+ l, r, j, w	ʃ+ r
m+ j	h+ j
n+ j	

Source: Gimson, 1980, p. 241

Table 8: Initial CCCV Clusters	
s + [p]	L, r, j
[t]	r, j
[k]	l, r, j, w

Source: Gimson, 1980, p. 241

19.2. Examples of Initial CCCV Consonant Clusters

Table 9: Initial CCCV Consonant Clusters				
Words	transcription	Pre-initial	Initial	Post-initial
sclerosis	skliə' rəʊsis	s	k	l
Spring	sprɪŋ	s	p	r
spume	spju:m	s	p	j
Square	skweə	s	k	w
street	stri:t	s	t	r

3. Final Consonant Clusters

Final consonant clusters can range up to four consonants (sixth siksθs). When a syllable ends in one consonant only. We call that phoneme as final consonants.

Of course any consonant can be a final except for the following (h, w, j).

Two-consonant final cluster can be organized into two sets. The first set includes a final consonant preceded by a pre-final consonant. In the second set, we can notice the final consonant which is followed by a post-final consonant.

The pre-final consonants encompass the following:

(m n ŋ l s). The post-final consonants also form a small set: (s z t d θ).

Table 10: Final VCC Clusters			
p+ t,	θ, s	ŋ+ k d	z
t+	θ, s	l+p, t, k, b, d, ʃ, dʒ, m, n, f, v, θ s z	
k+ t	θ, s	f+ t	θ s
b+	d	v+	d z
d+	z	θ+ t	s
g+	d	ð+ d	z
ʃ+ t		s+p, t, k,	
dʒ+	d	z+	d
m+p	d f θ z	ʃ+ t	
n+ t,	d ʃ dʒ θ s z	ʒ+	d

Source: Gimson, 1980, p. 246

Table 11: Final VCCC Clusters			
p+ t,	θ	p+s	
t+	θ	t+s	
k+ t		k+s	
m+p	f	d+s	
n+ t,	θ	m+ p	+ t
ŋ+ k		n+s,	ʃ
l+p, t, k, f,	θ	ŋ+s k	
f+ t,	θ	l+s, p, t, k ʃ	
s+p, t, k,		s+p,	k
n+ d		k+ s	
l+b, d, m n v	+ z	n+ t	
		ŋ+ k	+ θ
		l+ f	

Source: Gimson, 1980, p. 250

The pre-final consonants encompass the following: (m n ŋ l s). The post-final consonants also form a small set: (s z t d θ).

Table 12: Examples of Final VCCC Consonant Clusters

Syllable	pre-final	Final	Post-final	Post final 2	Post final 3
bangs	ŋ	g	z		
helped	l	p	t		
Fifths		f	θ	s	
next		k	s	t	
prompts	m	p	t	s	
Twelfths	l	f	θ	S	
texts		k	s	t	s